

## ◆ Large-Scale Marketing: Consortia and Site Licenses

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Publishers are being faced with new issues concerning access. There is a push for publishers to provide site licensing for corporations to access journals worldwide, and academic institutions are forming consortia for large-scale purchasing and access to journals.

Steven Hall said that site licensing, also known as the “big deal”, has two main characteristics. First, for an additional fee, the big deal provides institutions access to additional journals that they do not subscribe to individually. Second, it limits publishers’ annual price increases in return for multiyear commitments.

There are two types of big deals: cross-access deals and collection deals. In cross-access deals, all consortium members have access to all the journals to which they individually subscribe. In collection deals, an institution is granted access to almost all a publisher’s journals or all those in a particular field.

In a big deal, libraries typically pay 10-20% of what they spend on subscriptions to buy access to the rest of a publisher’s content. This is seen by many librarians as a good value because they receive extra

content at a relatively low cost.

For libraries, pros include an annual cap on price increases, more predictable pricing, a reduction in the cost of titles, and increased journal access. Cons include reduced flexibility and the inability to cancel low-use, high-cost titles.

Hall stressed that big deals are not mandatory. “No publisher is imposing the big deal on its customers,” he said. “Any Wiley-Blackwell customer can continue to

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subscribe to any combination of individual titles without any need for this big deal.”

For publishers and journals, pros include additional income, a more stable subscriber base, more predictable revenue, lower cancellation rates, a “significantly expanded” readership, and potentially more citations. Big deals may make it harder for publishers to launch new titles, because so much of a library’s budget is tied up in multiple deals that it has relatively little flexibility in discretionary spending. Other factors probably also play a role in the difficulty. Big deals can make it harder for journals to increase subscription volumes, because access to most content is opened in the deal. Hall said Wiley-Blackwell does not include new journals in its big deals, so it has time to establish core subscription bases.

Michael A Keller said that although big deals provide value for libraries, they can also create an imbalance in collections. Deals that focus on a particular discipline tend to overtake spending on others.

Big deals tend to disadvantage small publishers that have highly cited journals but a small number of titles. “Institutions that commit money—lots of it—to big deals end up not buying high-impact titles . . . they should in disciplines that are important to them,” Keller said. Hall said some opponents of the big deal claim that cancellations fall on smaller publishers that offer big deals, but he has seen no firm evidence to support this.

In addition, Keller mentioned that what libraries actually use tends to be a small portion of the titles included in big deals. Libraries spend a lot of money on poorly used titles.

Hall said that although some titles in big deals won’t be used by a particular institution, many titles are used. Blackwell conducted a study of six institutions in the United States and five in the United Kingdom and found that more than one-third of the institutions’ use was of journals not previously subscribed to. Use was determined by full-text article downloads, so although use quantity is known, quality is not.

Demand from libraries for the big deal is strong, and Hall believes that it will continue to evolve. “Current concerns over the lack of flexibility that are inherent in the big deal . . . are probably being overridden by what many librarians see as the benefits of wider access and the limit on price increases,” he said. “I think overall this genie is out of the bottle, and I don’t think it’s going to go back in easily.” 